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VOLUME LXV, NUMBER 19650 TUESDAY, JUNE 17, 1997 SWAN 12-5757 11 SAFAR 1418 NIS 4.50 (Eilat NIS 3.80)

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Massive bid to find conversion bill compromise

By HAIM SHAPIRO and LIAT COLLINS

Representatives of the American and Israeli Reform and Conservative movements last night said they are unsure whether they will agree to suspend their High Court petitions on conversion for three months, in the hope that by then a permanent solution to the issue could be found.

At a coalition meeting yesterday, unanimous agreement was reached for an initiative by MK Avraham Ravitz (United Torah Judaism) to freeze action on the conversion bill, which says that only the Chief Rabbinate may validate conversions in Israel, if the petitions also are suspended.

However, Rabbi Gil Nativ, president of the Israel Rabbinical Assembly (Conservative), said the leaders of the two movements would have to sit down, perhaps with their lawyers, and discuss all the various proposals, before they could say whether any offered a solution to the problem.

The effort to reach a compromise gained momentum as it became clear that Tsomet, Yisrael Ba'aliya, and the Third Way all would break coalition discipline and vote against the bill on its second and third readings.

The Knesset Law Committee is scheduled to meet today to discuss the bill, with the participation of Jewish Agency Chairman Avraham Burg and the non-Orthodox representatives.

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu yesterday confirmed reports that he had canceled his planned visit to the U.S.

"I will do everything possible to find a compromise that will be acceptable to all sides," he told reporters.

Following a meeting with coalition chairman Michael Eitan and MKs Ze'ev Begin and Alex Lubotzky, Rabbi Uri Regev, director of the Reform movement's Israel Religious Action Center, said that he and his colleagues were impressed by the sincerity of those with whom they had met, but they are still unsure whether there was enough of a basis to go to the families whom they represented and say that there would be a solution.

"We can't just think of ourselves in this issue. We are representing families in which there is real human suffering," he said.

The hopes that a solution was on the way appeared to ebb following a meeting between the non-Orthodox rabbis and former Ashkenazi chief rabbi Avraham Shapiro, who told them in no uncertain terms that the Chief Rabbinate is the only body in Israel which could authorize conversion.

The meeting had been heralded as a historic breakthrough, however it ended after only 20 minutes with the Reform and Conservative rabbis convinced that there was no basis for discussion.

Shapiro, who is considered to be one of the main spiritual mentors of the National Religious Party, told them that the supremacy of the Chief Rabbinate not only "discriminated" against the Reform and Conservative, but against many Orthodox groups which would like to conduct their own conversions.

Transport Minister Yitzhak Levy (NRP) told his faction that a public committee would be formed to find a compromise solution. This could take months or even a year, he said. Levy said that at present no compromise which had been raised was acceptable to the NRP.

The faction decided that apart from MK Shaul Yahalom, who chairs the Law Committee, the NRP MKs will not meet with the non-Orthodox representatives. Yahalom said he is prepared to discuss any solution, as long as it preserves the status quo and the status of the Chief Rabbinate.

See **COMPROMISE**, Page 2

15 Palestinians injured in Hebron riots

By MARGOT DUDKOVITCH, ARIEH O'SULLIVAN, and JON REIMANUEL

One border policeman and 15 Palestinians were wounded yesterday in the third consecutive day of rioting in Hebron. Clashes between Palestinians and IDF troops and border policemen continued throughout the day.

The rioting was less intense than previous days, and once again the Palestinian Police did not intervene.

Meanwhile, the IDF filed a strong complaint with the security coordination committee, accusing the Palestinian Police and the Palestinian Authority of not preventing Arabs from rioting around Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip.

The IDF complaint said the violations were particularly severe, since they took place while commanders on both sides were meeting in an effort to resolve the conflict. The complaint also accused the Palestinian Police of ignoring agreements to subdue the riots, the army said.

According to the IDF Spokesman, stones, firebombs, and a homemade pipe bomb were thrown at IDF troops and border policemen in Hebron yesterday. The spokesman said one Palestinian was arrested and detained for questioning.

At noon OC Central Command Maj.-Gen. Uzi Dayan and OC Judea and Samaria Maj.-Gen. Gabi Ophir visited the area. At the same time, a delegation from the Foreign Ministry toured the area with Hebron community spokesman Noam Arnon.

"The group consisted of Israeli ambassadors due to take up their post overseas who wanted to study the situation close up," Arnon said, adding that the group also saw rioting Palestinians and other violations of the Hebron Accord. "The situation is explosive," he said.

A PA security official defended the Palestinian Police inaction by saying, "We will not kill people in the streets just because the Israeli government did not pay what it was supposed to pay."

PA Brig. Samir Siksek, deputy chairman of the joint security committee said, said at a seminar on Extremism and Democracy under the auspices of the Israel-Palestine Center for Research and Information: "There is a limit to our power. If you crush your citizens, they are no longer obliged to fulfill any laws."

In Gush Katif, Palestinians accompanied by members of the media broke into the Abraham farm opposite Netzer Hazani at noon. According to Gush Katif spokesman Shlomo Kostiner, the Palestinians tore down the fence surrounding the farm that contains hundreds of dunams of agricultural plots tended by Gush Katif residents. Kostiner said the Palestinians damaged hothouses and uprooted vegetables. He added when IDF troops arrived they pushed the Palestinians off the farm.

The IDF Spokesman said that troops arrived almost immediately and fired rubber bullets and tear gas pellets to disperse the rioters.

The Spokesman said the Palestinians damaged crops and hothouses and during the clashes a Gush Katif resident fired shots into the air, but no one was injured. However, Palestinians claimed the resident shot a 25-year-old Palestinian man in the leg. He was hospitalized in Khan Yunis with moderate injuries, they said.



A border policeman grabs a Palestinian youth around the neck and arrests him for throwing rocks during clashes in Hebron yesterday. One border policeman and 15 Palestinian rioters were injured.

PM said looking to dump Meridor

By SARAH HOMIG, AMOTZ ASA-EL, and DAVID HARRIS

The latent discord between Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Finance Minister Dan Meridor took center stage yesterday, with speculation rife that Netanyahu is seeking to trigger Meridor's resignation.

Late last night, Meridor cancelled a trip to the United States for talks with Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Jordan's Crown Prince Hassan as he, Netanyahu and Bank of Israel Governor Jacob Frenkel were locked in debate over proposed currency exchange reforms which would potentially include, in addition to a foreign exchange reform, budgetary correction, and an interest rate cut.

The speculation over Meridor's future was heightened by Netanyahu's very emphatic refusal to comment about a possible cabinet reshuffle.

"I have absolutely no intention of getting into this," Netanyahu told reporters at the Knesset.

When asked whether he gives Meridor's performance high marks, he stated that he "will absolutely not hand out marks to anyone."

It is rumored that Netanyahu would like to see Meridor out of his government, and possibly replaced by Ariel Sharon. Sharon's National Infrastructure portfolio, according to this scenario, could then be handed over to Justice Minister Tzahi Hanegbi, whose portfolio would be restored to Ya'acov Ne'eman.

Moreover, if Meridor leaves, the total number of ministers would still stand at 17, thus making it possible for Netanyahu to co-opt one more minister to take over the science portfolio vacated by Ze'ev Begin. The law currently limits the number of ministers to 18. MK Sylvan Shalom is the chief contender for the science portfolio.

Meridor always has been considered Netanyahu's least favorite minister. He was appointed only after pressure by Begin, when the government formation process was at its height. Meridor has since become a constant dissenting voice, most notably during the Bar-On Affair.

Despite the reported bad blood between the two, the prevailing opinion around Netanyahu is that he cannot fire Meridor. This would incur the wrath of such ministers as Limor Livnat and get Netanyahu into too much political hot water. He can make life in the government more difficult for Meridor, but Likud insiders do not think that Meridor can easily be goaded into quitting.

Meanwhile, at the fifth annual Caesarea economic conference, Netanyahu said there will be virtually no foreign currency restrictions by this time next year. The conference is attended by the country's economic elite, under the auspices of the Israel Democracy Institute.

Netanyahu stopped short of casting the deciding vote in the ongoing dispute between the Treasury and Bank of Israel, though he promised to do so imminently.

"In about a year, we will go from a situation where everything is forbidden unless said otherwise, to a position where everything is permitted except for a certain relatively small number of specifics," he said.

Before Netanyahu's speech, both Agriculture Minister Rafael Eitan and Industry and Trade Minister Natan Sharansky urged him to hold an all-embracing cabinet debate on the economy before announcing any changes.

In a letter to Netanyahu, Sharansky urged, "in the most emphatic way, that no such steps be implemented until a dialogue is held with the participation of the relevant ministers, the Bank of Israel governor, and industry representatives."

See **MERIDOR**, Page 2

Barak plans to send team to London to study Blair's style

By SARAH HOMIG

Labor Party leader Ehud Barak plans to send a team of experts to Britain to learn the secret of Prime Minister Tony Blair's success.

Barak explained that he hopes "to find out what it was that Blair did to rehabilitate the British Labor Party and to bring it back to power. I would like to make use of his experience and to employ his methods here."

Barak said that he has not ruled out the possibility of renaming his party, as Blair did with his party. Barak said he is seriously considering changing the name to "the New Labor Party."

"This may have a psychological significance, though I am aware that a name isn't everything and that the really important thing is the substance of the message. But even names and appearances have their importance," he said.

Both positive and negative reactions flowed in from Labor MKs. Nissim Zivili, who resigned on Sunday as party secretary-general, said he thinks that "the notion of a new name for the party is altogether superfluous. It is the same party and it smells the same no matter what you call it."

"What is important is that the party be rehabilitated and that it get closer to the grass roots, instead of doing what was done when the Histadrut was called the 'New Histadrut.' That did not generate an outpouring of enthusiasm for the Histadrut."

But Yossi Beilin said that "a new name might not be a bad idea. It would embody the fact that we are dealing with an old that we are reestablishing, which has established party, which has contributed so much to this country and yet which seeks to renew and revitalize itself and makes itself relevant once more."

Soldier killed, three others wounded in Lebanon

By DAVID RUDGE

Fighting continued in south Lebanon yesterday, following the explosion in the security zone on Sunday night which damaged a Merkava tank, killing Staff-Sgt. Ya'acov Algamis and wounding three other soldiers.

Algamis, 20, of Jerusalem, of the Givati Brigade, was buried at the Mt. Herzl Military Cemetery yesterday evening.

He died while being evacuated by helicopter to Haifa's Rambam Hospital, after a two-hour rescue operation to extricate the casualties from inside the tank.

Two of the wounded were released after treatment at the hospital, but the third was detained. He was reported to be suffering from light injuries.

The incident occurred in the security zone's western sector. Initial inquiries by Northern Command revealed that the tank ran over two mines which damaged its treads, although there was no penetration of its armor.

The mines also may have been connected to a large explosive device which also detonated, adding to the shock of the blast.

Hizbullah claimed responsibility for the incident. The shock wave also caused the casualties among the soldiers aboard the tank and prevented them from getting out because who had apparently suffered internal injuries.

"When it became clear that there were casualties, the rescue force got to the scene very quickly, but operation took a long time because the two access points were jammed. It took about two hours until we managed to extricate the casualties," said Amitai.

"There were two mines, which is called a sandwich, and possibly a very powerful explosive shock device as well. The matter is still being investigated."

One of the aspects of the investigation is likely to concentrate on ways of fitting tanks with additional escape hatches or other means of getting out, in the event that the main access points are jammed.

The incident further heightened tension in south Lebanon, following the recent escalation in Hizbullah attacks.

A Lebanese civilian was lightly wounded yesterday in a roadside bomb blast in the Jezzein enclave north of the security zone.

There were also reports of long-range mortar fire at an IDF outpost in the zone's eastern sector. There were no casualties.

Bikur Cholim Hospital, Jerusalem

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of Singapore

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long life and success*

The Board of Directors



Non-Jewish spouses forced to leave country while marriages checked

By BATSHEVA TSUR

Dozens of mixed marriages have not been recognized by the Interior Ministry and non-Jewish spouses have been forced to leave the country for an unspecified period, because of a change in ministry policy, civil rights advocates said yesterday.

number of "marriages of convenience," they have been forced to change the policy whereby non-Jewish spouses are registered as immigrants under the Law of Return, with accompanying benefits.

Association for Civil Rights in Israel on behalf of three couples who were married abroad. All applied to have their marriages registered here and to get Israeli citizenship.



Industry and Trade Minister Natan Sharansky (r) yesterday greets Rabbi Jerome Epstein (l), executive vice president of the Conservative Movement's United Synagogue of America and Rabbi Reuven Hammer, head of its Rabbinical Assembly of Israel, here to lobby against the conversion bill. (Photo 90)

IN CONTEXT / HERB KEINON

Frantic search for conversion compromise

"Cease-fire," "an agreed upon solution," "an agreement that will last a long time," "national consensus." These expressions, generally used in the context of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, were heard yesterday relating to negotiations over the conversion bill.



Michael Eitan (Sass Hara)

Coalition chairman Michael Eitan has even become a kind of Dennis Ross, shuttling between the sides in search of an opening.

Eitan's job is, before June 30, to come up with a compromise between the Orthodox and non-Orthodox camps that would obviate the need for a law on conversion, or for the High Court to rule on the Conservative Movement's petition to recognize its converts.

The whole issue is an extension of the "Who is a Jew" issue of the 1980s. But if the question in the 1980s was whether Reform and Conservative converts abroad would be recognized in Israel - they are - the question today is if Reform and Conservative Jews converted here should be recognized - they are not.

conversion after marrying an Israeli, and asked the Interior Ministry to register her as a Jew.

The court, in a complex decision, said it was asked to rule whether the state's reasons for not registering her were wrong, not whether Reform conversions are valid. And, indeed, it ruled that the state's reasoning was invalid, giving de facto recognition to Reform conversions. But it stopped short of explicitly recognizing non-Orthodox conversions, saying this should be decided by the Knesset.

A Knesset committee was established, and there were proposals for legislation both to validate and invalidate Reform conversions. They moved nowhere.

Because the Knesset did not act, the petition to the High Court on the conversion of the babies was meant to force the issue. It has.

The religious parties, realizing that the court could very well recognize these adoptions, drew up the conversion bill, which was also spelled out in the Netanyahu government's guidelines.

The conversion bill, which passed its first reading earlier this year, stipulates that only conversions performed in Israel under Orthodox auspices will be recognized by the state.

The first, in 1995, was brought by Eliyani Goldstein, a Brazilian who underwent a Reform conversion.

Mothers of soldiers in Lebanon repeat call for IDF pullout

By DAVID RUDGE

Mothers of sons serving in the security zone in Lebanon yesterday called on the government to "seriously discuss" ways of solving the Lebanon problem and pulling the IDF out.

"The death of another soldier in south Lebanon on Sunday night is further sad proof of the need to do something quickly," said Miri Sela, one of the founders of a group pressing for the withdrawal of the IDF from what she called the "Lebanese morass."

She said the group, founded two months ago by four mothers, now has hundreds of activists throughout the country, including many fathers and young people "both those before and after army service."

"We have already gathered thousands of signatures of people supporting our campaign and we plan to hold a meeting of activists soon to plan our next steps," said Sela, a resident of Kibbutz Mahanayim in the Upper Galilee.

"We also intend to set up a lobby in the Knesset and mobilize the support among left and right wingers who don't agree with the policies over south Lebanon and the present situation there. We intend to shatter the lie that nothing can be done," she said.

Masha Sheindorf, of Haifa, whose son has already completed two tours of duty in south Lebanon, said their hearts went out to the family of the soldier who was killed, along with their condolences.

"The problem is that those who don't have sons in Lebanon don't know what it's like. Every time I hear the planes going over, even at night, or I hear that there have been exchanges, I immediately switch on the radio to try and find out what's going on," said Sheindorf.

"I joined the campaign not just for the sake of our own son, but for the others serving there or who will serve in Lebanon in the future, and their families."

"We support our son while he's there and we realize it is not an easy problem to solve, but solutions can and should be found to end the status quo that has existed for over 15 years and has cost so much," she added.

Agriculture Minister Rafael Eitan, in an interview with Israel Radio yesterday, maintained, however, that there are no easy answers.

"Every mother is concerned for her son, but there are other mothers' sons we have to protect and they live in Kiryat Shmona, Ma'alot, Rosh Hanikra and Avivim," said Eitan.

"What would those mothers say if the terrorists returned because we were no longer in Lebanon? The forces they [terrorists] are trying to use against us are hitting the IDF and the SLA instead of the [Galilee] communities."

"But that's the task of the army - to protect the residents and ensure that the children can go to kindergarten safely," said Eitan.

President Ezer Weizman said he could not support the mothers' group, because the conflict in Lebanon is "not simple."

"There's a general staff, there's a Defense Ministry, and there's a government, and they will decide," he said, while visiting with Staff-Sgt. Shai Samiya, who was wounded in Sunday's incident in Lebanon and is in Haifa's Rambam Hospital. "It's not easy to say, but we've been through tougher times, like at the Suez Canal and in the Jordan Valley."

Itim contributed to this report.

US may hit Hizbullah drug trade

By STEVE ROOAN

The US is considering an offensive against Hizbullah to destroy its huge drug and counterfeiting network, that exports heroin, cocaine, and forged dollars there and into other Western states, officials say.

They say drug money plays a major role in the financing of Hizbullah's military campaign against Israel and terrorist operations abroad.

"You can trace the drugs that are pouring into America from Hizbullah, Lebanon, and Syria," a senior official said.

"There is no doubt of Hizbullah involvement in drug production," Dep.-Cmdr. Shmuel Narkis, head of special operations in the Internal Security Ministry, told the Knesset War on Drugs Committee yesterday. "Everybody familiar with Lebanon knows this."

The proposed US campaign would involve American pressure on Iran, Lebanon, and Syria - all of which cooperate with Hizbullah's drug and counterfeiting network.

"It is important to recruit the West and the US in this war [against Hizbullah]," Col. Reuven Erlich, deputy government coordinator for Lebanon, told the War on Drugs Committee yesterday. "Hizbullah has enough money from this [drug] production to flourish the organization. There is apparently a connection between drugs and terror. This assumption must be tested in a precise way."

The assertion is shared by US security officials, sources say, who dispute the 1996 State Department report on international drug trafficking. That report praised the governments of Lebanon and Syria for banning drug production in the Bekaa Valley, while acknowledging the difficulty of shutting down that region's laboratories, which "are located in areas generally controlled by [elements] of Hizbullah and would require a large and concentrated effort to root them [out]."

Israeli officials say the country is being flooded with Hizbullah-produced drugs, although the country is not the main target of the Lebanese group. These drugs make their way through Israel to Egypt and North Africa.

Israel is actually only a small part of the comprehensive Hizbullah policy of exporting drugs," Erlich said. "The [Hizbullah] intention is primarily to flood the West and the US. But for us, this is a flood in light of the great demand for drugs within Israeli society."

Western intelligence sources say the drug route for Hizbullah and its Lebanese and Syrian allies begins in South America. Lebanon imports from Colombia, Peru, Brazil and other countries poppies and chemicals needed to produce cocaine. The Lebanese are assisted by emigrants in these countries. In addition, these Lebanese dealers, including the son of President Elias Hrawi, import from the Far East as well as from such countries as Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, and Syria the morphine base to produce heroin.

The drugs are then manufactured in laboratories in the Bekaa Valley and exported by air or sea or through Syria, which sources say serves as a transit station for both incoming and outgoing drugs, as well as providing protection for the drug traffic.

Israeli sources estimate the profits from this trade at billions of dollars a year. They say the Syrians alone rake in \$1b. a year in what has become a large element in supporting its economy and enriching those loyal to President Hafez Assad.

In addition to drugs, the Syrians, Lebanese, and Hizbullah cooperate in counterfeiting Western currencies. The quality of the forgeries is considered high due to the US printing equipment given to Iran during the Shah's reign in the 1970s and later transferred to the Bekaa Valley.

The intelligence sources say Iran is also involved in counterfeiting large quantities of dollars, marks, and French and Swiss francs. The US Secret Service, responsible for US currency, is said to be alarmed by this development and has established a permanent office in Cyprus to monitor the manufacture and shipment of forged dollars.

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Palestinians demonstrate Congress recognizing a new gov't

new gov't

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Proposal would have only one chief rabbi per city

By HAIM SHAPIRO

Everyone knows that chief rabbis come in pairs, Ashkenazi and Sephardi, but now there is a proposal before the Chief Rabbinical Council to change all that, and have only one chief rabbi, at least in towns and cities.

At present, every town and city has two chief rabbis, unless the community is very small and has a population which is almost entirely either Ashkenazi or Sephardi.

The Yemenite Jews, who regard themselves as neither, are largely ignored in this arrangement.

chief rabbi in each town was put forward yesterday by Haifa Chief Rabbi She'ar-Yashuv Cohen, who said that in many cases the respective duties of each rabbi are not clear, thus leading to a paralysis of the local rabbinates. Cohen was perhaps referring to the occasions when the two chief rabbis of a town or city cannot get along with one another.

Those supporting the present situation argued that the double roles are needed because of the special needs of the local populations. The council appointed a committee to study the situation. There was no suggestion that there should also be only one chief rabbi for all of Israel.

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NEWS

in brief

Two arrested in Acre demonstrations

Two people were arrested during a violent confrontation yesterday between police and Acre residents who blocked the road leading to the city's industrial zone. Police warned the demonstrators to disperse, but when they did not, police broke up the protest with water cannons. The city has been demanding that Acre be granted Development Area A status, which has been granted to Karmiel and Nahariya. The status confers tax benefits on investors.

Demonstrators said that on Friday, 10 busloads of people would travel to Jerusalem to protest in front of the Prime Minister's Office during the weekly cabinet meeting. Acre Mayor Eli de Castro is to meet tomorrow with Prime Minister's Office Director-General Avigdor Lieberman. *Itim*

More arrests in Har Adar shooting

Eighteen Palestinians have been arrested in connection with the Friday night shooting of Ofri Feldman, 23, near Har Adar. Since the incident, the IDF has arrested 12 more suspects from the villages of Beit Tzurif and Katana, in addition to the six from Bidu who were arrested late Friday.

Security sources said yesterday that it appeared the incident was not a drive-by shooting, but that the terrorists shot from the roadside and fled in a waiting car. *Itim*

Hammer hospitalized for abdominal surgery

Education Minister Zevulun Hammer entered Hadassah-University Hospital, Ein Kerem, yesterday for abdominal surgery. He has been suffering from an abdominal infection and his physician decided that an operation is necessary. *Itim*

Diplomat's life saved

The life of a 60-year-old Egyptian diplomat was saved yesterday when he was resuscitated by a private ambulance team after losing consciousness at Tel Aviv University. The diplomat, who was clinically dead, underwent electric shocks and received special medications. In 20 minutes, his heartbeat returned and his blood pressure was normal, but he remained unconscious. He was brought to Ichilov Hospital in Tel Aviv for more treatment. In only a minority of cases are clinically dead people successfully resuscitated. *Judy Siegel*

Surgery saves woman's sight

A 60-year-old woman with a cyst in the base of her skull that grew so fast that she was blinded can see again after emergency surgery at Soroka Hospital in Beersheba. Scans showed the cyst had caused the destruction of bones in the skull and had pressed on her optic nerves. *Judy Siegel*

Gasoline prices drop

Gasoline prices went down today. Lead-free (95 octane) dropped 1.8 percent to NIS 3.23 a liter, from NIS 3.29, and 96 octane went down 2.1% to NIS 3.22, from NIS 3.29. The price of heating oil dropped 7.9%. The decreases were caused by a lowering of the price of oil in the Mediterranean basin and by changes in the dollar-shekel exchange rate. *Jerusalem Post Staff*

Panel: MK immunity should be withdrawn by public body

By LIAT COLLINS

Authority for rescinding parliamentary immunity should be taken from the Knesset House Committee and put in the hands of an external public body, the public committee on parliamentary immunity recommended yesterday. The committee, headed by former justice minister Moshe Nissim, presented its findings to Knesset Speaker Dan Tichon.

The five-member public committee would be composed primarily of former MKs, but not active politicians.

Nissim said MKs should accept

the recommendations of the committee, because until today the House Committee has not refused to rescind an MK's parliamentary immunity for fear of being accused of playing politics. Nissim said a public body would feel freer to decide.

"For the first time there is a chance that a decision will be taken not to rescind immunity," said Uriel Lynn, another member of the panel and a former chairman of the Knesset Law Committee.

In another field, the committee recommended restricting MKs' immunity on charges of slander

and libel to incidents which take place in the Knesset, in either the plenum or a committee meeting. Even press releases which are unrelated to things said in the plenum or a committee would be considered as if they were written outside.

Nissim explained the suggested change by saying that, in many cases, a private individual might feel slandered by an MK but has no recourse because the parliamentarian operates under blanket immunity.

One area in which immunity should be extended, said Nissim, is MKs' protection against a

search of their papers. This category should be broadened to include computers and other electronic information systems, which did not exist when the law was conceived.

Another suggested change is requiring the police to obtain the permission of the attorney-general before opening an investigation of an MK.

Nissim said that even if the recommendations are implemented, MKs will enjoy more parliamentary immunity than their counterparts in almost any other country.

Committee member Haim Zadok, another former justice

minister, said that, since the whole issue of parliamentary immunity conflicts with the principle of equality under the law, MKs should remember it is not an individual privilege, but one given to the Knesset to help it in its work.

In order to implement the recommendations, the Knesset would have to pass an amendment to the law on parliamentary privilege, and it is not clear whether this has enough support. Tichon, who appointed the panel, said its report would be discussed by the Knesset House Committee as soon as possible.

Eisenbergs battle over estate

The heirs to the country's biggest fortune yesterday accused each other of break-ins and illegal stock transfers, as the court battle for the \$1.2 billion empire of tycoon Shoul Eisenberg heated up.

The fight pits Eisenberg's widow, Leah, and five daughters against his only son, Erwin. Mrs. Eisenberg is disputing a 1986 will that leaves 80 percent of the business empire to Erwin. The original of the will was never found.

In a new affidavit filed with the courts, Erwin Eisenberg accused his mother of breaking into safes and locked drawers in their family home.

"She broke into them independently by ordering a specialist to open them," the son's lawyer, Tuvia Erlich, said. "According to Erwin, those safes had at least tens of thousands of dollars in different currencies, if not more."

Mrs. Eisenberg's lawyer, Ya'acov Weinroth, said there never was a break-in. "The mother had a key to the safe that included her personal belongings," he said. (AP)



A special kind of Bar Mitzva

Avraham Malicho uses sign language to deliver the blessings over the Torah at his bar mitzva yesterday, coached by Rabbi Zvi Markuse. Twelve deaf boys celebrated their bar mitzva at Jerusalem's Moshet Avraham (Conservative) Synagogue. (Brian Hendler)

High Court refuses petition to delay Deri fraud trial

By BATSHEVA TSUR

Shas MK Aryeh Deri's fraud trial will continue in Jerusalem District Court, after the High Court of Justice yesterday rejected a petition for its postponement.

Following the publication of the attorney-general's report on the Bar-On Affair, Deri petitioned the court, claiming that the judges could not help but be influenced by the publication of the report, which called for his indictment for his role in the affair.

The judges are human beings, and even with the best will in the world, it is not possible that they would not be subconsciously affected by what is said outside the courtroom, Deri argued.

But the State Attorney's Office argued that district court judges are experienced and professional and



Aryeh Deri (Ariel Jenzolimski)

would judge the case solely on the basis of the evidence. It said that it is in the public interest that the trial be concluded as early as possible.

Judges are often expected to avoid being influenced by external events and have the ability to shut them out. Justices Aharon Barak, Eliezer Goldberg, and Tova Strassberg-Cohen said, in turning down the request.

This is not the first time Deri has asked to have the trial suspended. Last month, he wrote to Attorney-General Elyakim Rubinstein with a similar request, but was turned down.

Deri, who was at the hearing, refused to comment on the ruling. But his lawyer said: "My feeling is that when the two most influential figures in the legal system - the attorney-general and the state attorney - have spoken out so clearly against Deri, there is bound to be a subconscious influence even on the most professional and fair judges."

Yad Sarah to open in NY

By JUDY SIEGEL

The Federal Employment and Guidance Service in New York has formed a partnership with Yad Sarah to establish a Yad Sarah organization in the US.

The Israelis will teach the New York organization how to set up medical equipment lending centers and provide many of the other services offered by Yad Sarah.

A delegation of FECS officials who recently visited Yad Sarah were impressed by the range of volunteer-based services provided to enable the sick, elderly and disabled to be cared for at home. Yad Sarah services 250,000 people a year on a budget of only \$7 million.

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Romania still hopes for NATO inclusion

LISBON - Romania is still hopeful of being admitted to NATO at the military alliance's summit in Madrid next month, despite firm US opposition, Defense Minister Victor Babuc said yesterday.

Babuc, who is on a two-day visit to NATO member Portugal, told the *Publico* newspaper that if Romania were excluded it would be an injustice as the country met the conditions for entry to the military partnership.

"NATO is a military alliance... (and) on that basis Romania is the country that best meets the conditions. Amongst all the candidates, only Poland has a greater military capacity," he said.

"The southern flank of NATO is its weakest. It is close to the Balkans, the Middle East, the Black Sea and (other) factors of greatest risk - fundamentalism, arms trafficking and terrorism," he said.

Babuc, who will meet Portuguese Defense Minister Antonio Vitorino and President Jorge Sampaio during his stay, said the US was committing an injustice in trying to exclude Romania.

"(But) the Romanian people have not given up hope that the US declaration (of opposition) will prove temporary," he said.

Meanwhile in Romania, some 7,000 workers went on strike yesterday in Brasov to protest plans for layoffs at their state-owned truck plant and demand the firing of some of the managers. They ended their walkout after three plant directors were suspended.

Workers in this city in central Romania are protesting reported plans by the government to lay off 3,000 workers at the Roman truck factory which, like 4,000 other state-owned companies, is scheduled to be privatized. (Agencies)

French leave amid Congo fighting

BRAZZAVILLE (AP) - French troops began packing up and pulling out yesterday, saying their job of rescuing foreigners was done, though they were sad to leave the Republic of Congo engulfed in war.

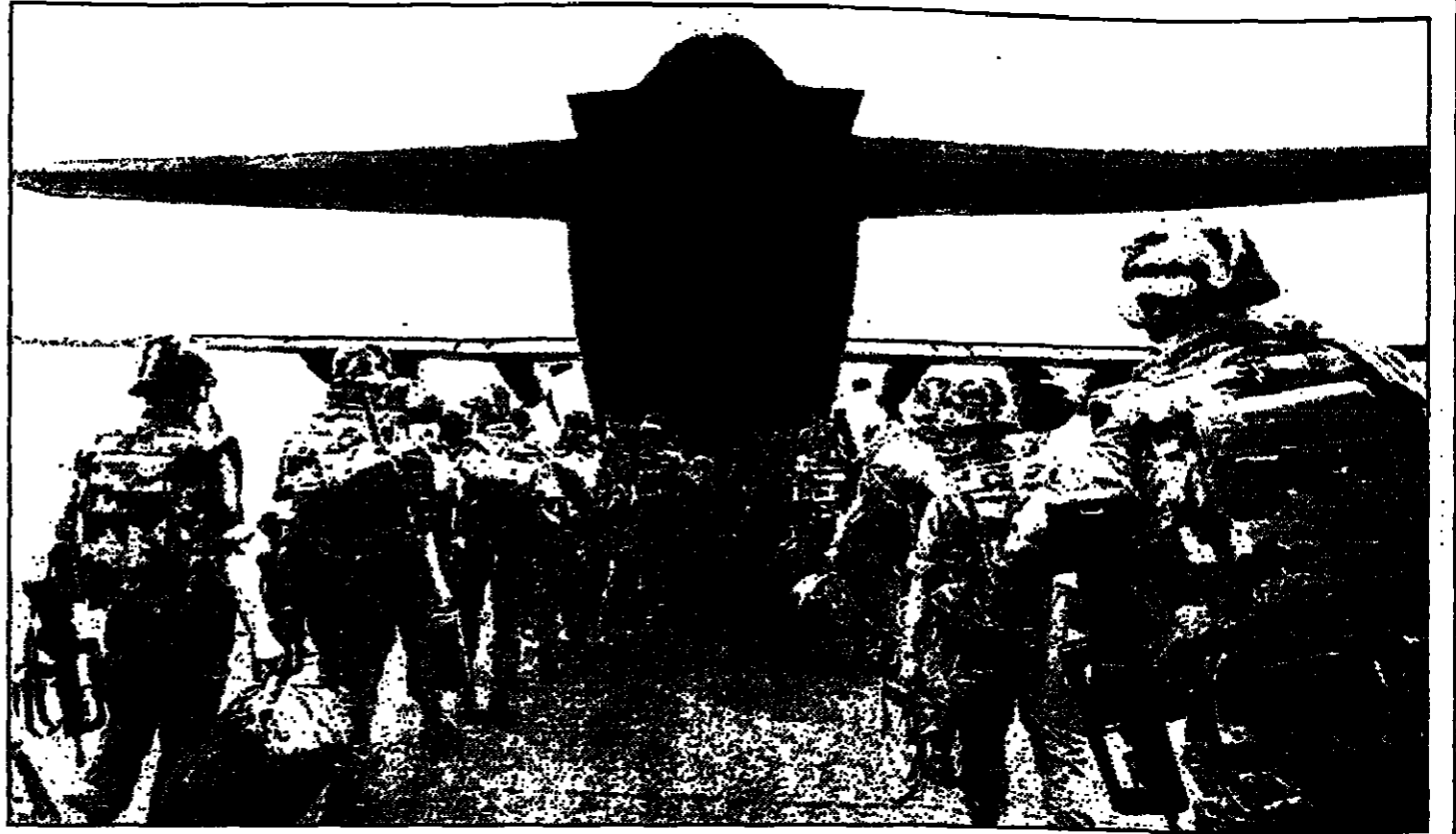
News of France's plans to leave had been followed by some of the fiercest fighting in days between President Pascal Lissouba and his rival, Gen. Denis Sassou-Nguesso. The two sides were believed to be getting into position for a battle for the airport, now controlled by French troops.

Mortar and automatic rifle fire were heard all night and into yesterday morning.

France, the former colonial power, has said it will continue to support peacemaking efforts in the Republic of Congo, but that its military mission will end as planned. It was expected to take a week for the 1,200 French soldiers to withdraw.

The first flight carrying "non-essential" French military equipment and personnel to Gabon and Chad took off early yesterday, to be followed, officials said, by another every 40 minutes for most of the day. Troops packed computers and furniture into crates to be loaded onto the planes.

"It is an achievement to have evacuated close to 6,000 people in very difficult conditions," said Col. Henri Pelissier, a French army spokesman. "We are also leaving with some sadness because we lost one soldier... and had six others injured. And sadness too to leave a country in a civil war. We hope that



French troops enter a transport plane at Brazzaville airport yesterday.

(Reuters)

the mediation that is taking place in Libreville is successful so that war does not break out again when we leave, resulting in new massacres," Pelissier said.

Representatives of Lissouba and Sassou-Nguesso opened talks in Libreville, Gabon yesterday to try to arrange a peace summit between the two leaders, according to radio reports from Gabon.

The presidents of Gabon, the Central African Republic and Chad and diplomats from the United Nations, the European Union and France were observing the talks.

Fighting erupted June 5 when Lissouba sent government forces to disarm Sassou-Nguesso's private militia. Lissouba said he acted to avert violence before a July 27 presidential election in this central African nation.

Sassou-Nguesso, a former dictator who will run against Lissouba, claimed the president sparked the clashes to delay the vote and keep power.

Lissouba, speaking on French television Sunday, appealed to France to leave troops in Brazzaville, afraid that a pullout might lead to the collapse of his government.

"I launch a strident appeal. We would have liked the French forces, with ourselves and with the opposition... to create a peacekeeping force to avoid what has been happening today," he told France 3 television.

Croatia polls said not fair

ZAGREB (AP) - Presidential elections in which Franjo Tudjman won another term were marred by shortcomings, including strong media bias in favor of the incumbent, international monitors said yesterday.

Former US Sen. Paul Simon, head of the monitoring mission of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, told reporters that Sunday's elections were "free but not fair." He cited what he said were "fundamental flaws" in the campaign, and singled out bias on the part of the media, most of which is controlled by the state. The elections, Simon said, "did not meet the minimum standards for democracies."

Tudjman's victory was never seriously in question. With 93 percent of the votes counted, the 75-year-old incumbent collected 61 percent of the vote.

EU summit approves stability pact

AMSTERDAM - European Union leaders yesterday approved a controversial budget stability pact and a resolution on boosting employment and growth hammered out by finance ministers, Dutch Prime Minister Wim Kok said.

"It is with a great feeling of satisfaction that I can tell you the European Council has just reached complete agreement on what our finance ministers decided earlier," Kok told a news conference on the first day of a two-day summit.

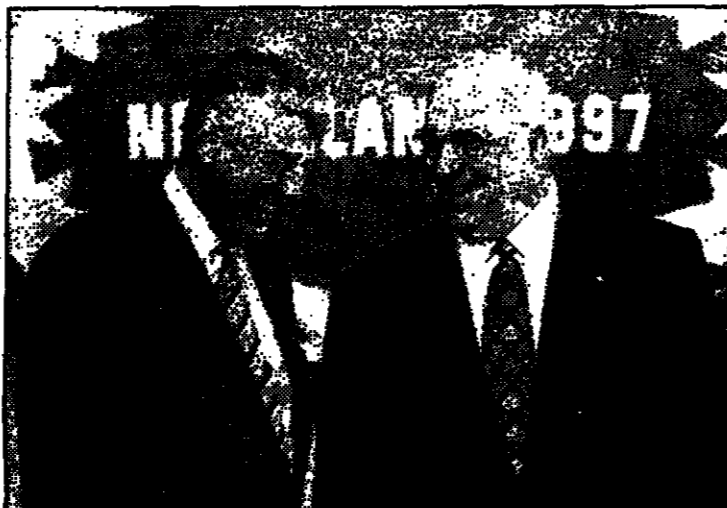
The EU summit can now focus on its next great turn-of-the-century project - expansion into Eastern Europe.

The agreement, worked out by finance ministers at the EU's mid-year summit, was a compromise matching Germany's insistence on tight finances with French demands for more spending on job creation.

"We now have the legal and economic framework in place for European monetary union," said EU Finance Commissioner Yves-Thibault de Silguy. "It's a strong signal to the markets."

Under the deal, the EU ratifies a German-inspired pact to underpin the common currency by fixing nations that run up big budget deficits after the switch to the new currency, to be called the euro.

To get the new French Socialist government to go along, other



German Chancellor Helmut Kohl meets with Dutch Prime Minister Wim Kok during the EU summit.

nations agreed to work closer together to find jobs for the EU's 18 million unemployed.

The deal put the EU's drive for a single European currency by 1999 back on track after a week of uncertainty and jitters on financial markets after France's new Socialist government asked for a delay to study the stability pact.

The jobs resolution, drafted at French insistence, called for enhanced coordination of EU employment policies and a new drive by the Union's lending arm, the European Investment Bank, to promote small businesses innovat-

Top model back at work after drug scare

PARIS (Reuters) - British model Naomi Campbell returned to work in Paris yesterday after receiving emergency treatment in a Canary Islands hospital, her agent said.

Xavier Moreau of Elite modeling agency, denying Campbell had been treated for a drug overdose, said she had suffered an allergy to antibiotics which she had taken for stomach pains.

"It was an allergy to antibiotics, she didn't take barbiturates," he said. "She has resumed her activities." The 26-year-old model was taken semi-conscious from her five-star hotel on the Spanish island of Gran Canaria early on Sunday.

An official at Nuestra Senora del Pino hospital said she was admitted to intensive care after "an overdose."

She left the hospital on Sunday evening and flew back to Paris by private plane.

Moreau said he had spoken to Campbell by telephone and "it's much ado about nothing. The proof is she is not in the hospital."

"At first we thought it was appendicitis. She had stomach cramps." Local media on the Canary Islands reported that Campbell had had an argument with her boyfriend, 28-year-old flamenco dancer Joaquin Cortes, who is in Gran Canaria with his hugely successful *Gypsy Passion* dance show.

At the luxury hotel residents complained late on Saturday about a heated conversation between the two. Campbell then appeared extremely nervous and took some form of medicine, hotel staff said.

Ellis Island falling into ruin

NEW YORK (AP) - Ellis Island, which was the first stop for millions of immigrants entering the United States, has fallen into such disrepair that one organization has named it one of "America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places." The National Trust for Historic Preservation blamed congressional underfunding of the National Park Service for allowing buildings on the island to crumble from decay and lack of maintenance.

"Ellis Island is truly one of our country's most recognized and beloved historic places, but important pieces of this symbol of the American Dream are being allowed to fall into ruin," the trust's president, Richard Moe, said in a statement.

Moe pointed out that the restored Main Building on Ellis Island was reopened with great fanfare in 1990, and other buildings have been restored as part of the Ellis Island Immigration Museum. But he said there are buildings on the island's south side that are in dire need of repair.

The decaying buildings include a hospital where immigrants too sick to be allowed in the country were treated.

"To preserve Ellis Island and lesser-known places which together make up the rich tapestry of our nation's history, increased federal funding and more creative partnerships are urgently needed to protect and maintain the historic resources within our park system," Moe said.

He estimated that 40 percent of all Americans can trace their ancestry to Ellis Island immigrants. Twelve million immigrants are estimated to have

passed through Ellis Island between 1892 and 1954.

"This is a wake-up call to all Americans," Moe said. "We cannot take our past for granted. Once these links are gone, they cannot be replaced." The Trust scheduled a news conference yesterday on the island in New York Harbor to discuss its findings.

The other sites on the "endangered list" are: the Congressional Cemetery in Washington; the Flathead Indian Reservation, Montana; the Bridge of Lions, St. Augustine, Florida; the Cranston Street Armory, Providence, Rhode Island; and the Montezuma Castle, Montezuma, New Mexico.

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Reuven Ben Dor, The Jerusalem Post Magazine.

ISRAELI SHARES IN NEW YORK

Table with columns: LAST, CHANGE, AMEX, NASDAQ. Lists various Israeli companies and their stock prices.

MISHTANIM LEADING 100 TASE ISSUES

Table with columns: LAST, CHANGE. Lists top 100 Mishtanim TASE issues.

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Table with columns: LAST, CHANGE. Lists international shares.

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Table with columns: LAST, CHANGE. Lists New York stock market data.

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Table with columns: LAST, CHANGE. Lists Euroshare data.

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Stocks increase on hopes for rate cut

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By ROBERT DANIEL. Stock indexes leaped to records after the Consumer Price Index rose a lower-than-estimated 0.5 percent, fueling hopes the central bank would cut interest rates, potentially boosting corporate profits.

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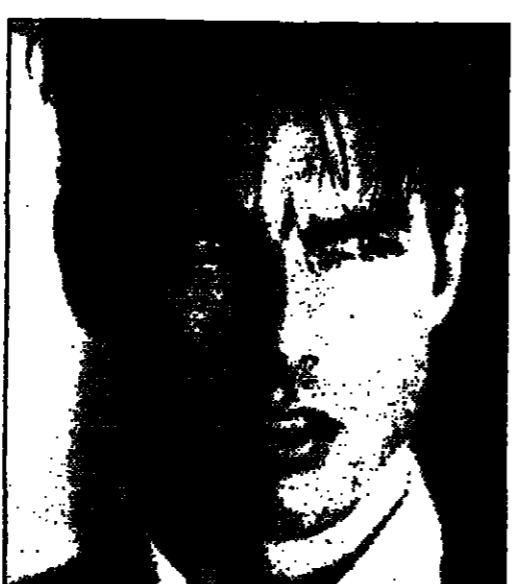
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